

V: THE GOLDEN AGE, Part 2 *The LP-45 boom becomes an explosion*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the years 1940-1956 were so rich culturally that it is virtually impossible to describe it all in one chapter, and Americans of all economic and educational backgrounds had free or inexpensive access to music that was once only the province of the very wealthy. One should note that, in addition to the various innovations mentioned previously, radio too was part of this free dissemination of the arts. The crown jewel of its epistle may have been Toscanini, but there were also the weekly Metropolitan Opera broadcasts sponsored by Texaco Oil, a commercial-free venue that would continue uninterrupted until the 2003-04 season, when the company—no longer interested in promoting music that few of their customers listened to—allowed their contract to expire. And then there were two programs, independently sponsored, that brought classical, semi-classical and quasi-classical vocal music to listeners on a weekly basis, the Bell Telephone Hour and The Voice of Firestone. Both had somewhat middlebrow programming, yet they still brought such great singers as Maggie Teyte and Jussi Björling to thousands who would otherwise be unaware of their greatness.

During the early LP era, too, “new” conductors (or, at least, conductors previously not known by the general public) were suddenly brought to the fore. As inventor of the LP, Columbia was first, producing records by the New York Philharmonic’s new music director, Artur Rodzinski, as well as his replacement, the great Dmitri Mitropoulos (though, since the New York musicians didn’t “like” Mitropoulos, they rarely played their best for him); a remarkable Polish conductor, Paul Kletzki, in his first EMI recordings with Walter Legge’s newly-formed Philharmonia Orchestra; and the draconian Hungarian, Fritz Reiner, then the music director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. EMI, in addition to promoting Kletzki and Karajan, also invested heavily in two great conductors who were to have an enormous impact on future generations of listeners, the Russian expatriate Igor Markevitch and a young German who just managed to escape blackballing for his Nazi affiliations, Rudolf Kempe. Markevitch was fiery and largely associated with Mozart and the Russian composers like Tchai-kovsky and Stravinsky, while Kempe, more lyrical, seemed to combine the transparent textures of Toscanini with a somewhat more rhetorical sense of phrasing to produce performances of the Teutonic repertoire that would entrance listeners for decades.

Yet it was RCA who, possibly making up for their late entry to the LP market, signed the most and the best new conductors. In 1949, following the sudden death of Serge Koussevitzky, the Alsatian conductor Charles Munch, already somewhat known to American listeners, became the new music director of the Boston Symphony. Since this orchestra had been a Victor property since the years when Karl Muck was its music director, they inherited Munch the same way they inherited Koussevitzky. But even RCA probably did not realize how great and yet how bad Munch’s association with the label would be. For all his inspiration and fire, Munch was lackadaisical in rehearsals, which sometimes led to incredibly sloppy performances



(which finally got him fired from the orchestra in 1962) and equally sloppy recording sessions. Enter the Magic of Tape, which could be spliced ad infinitum until a “perfect” performance could be achieved. Perhaps the worst of all the Munch recordings, as far as number of splices was concerned, was that of Debussy’s “La Mer,” a work that Toscanini achieved perfection in by drilling it into his NBC forces. The Munch recording, even on LP but especially on CD, sounds like a minute-by-minute succession of tape splices. Of course, others came out much finer, but this kind of studio angst made recording with Munch an adventure to say the least.

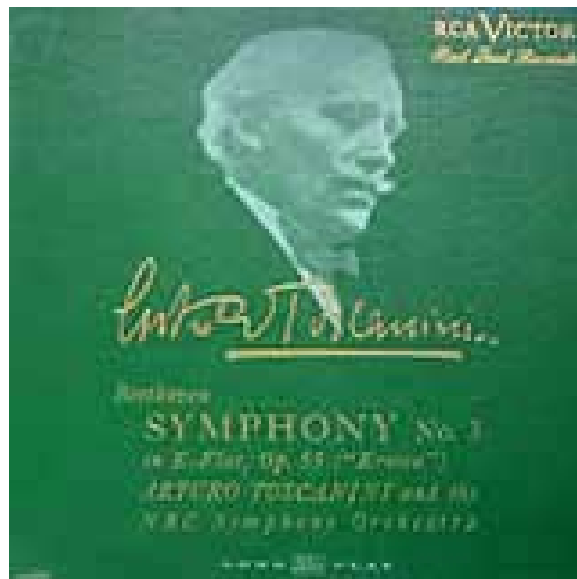
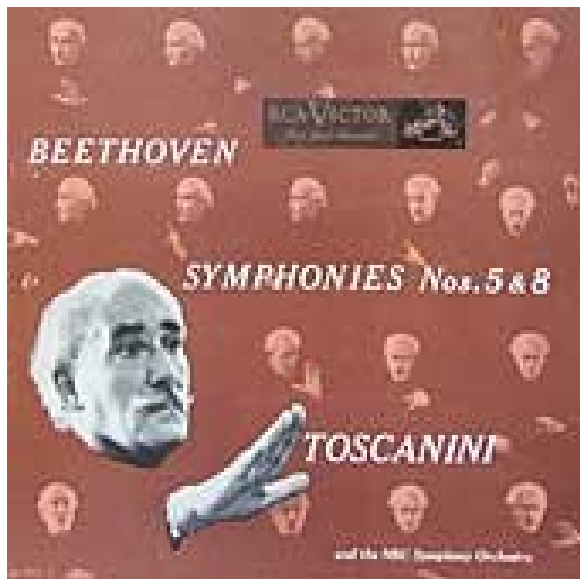
RCA’s other star conductors were much more reliable. Among them were Guido Cantelli, the young Italian who was a special protégé of Toscanini; his recordings with the NBC Symphony and, post-NBC, his EMI recordings with the Philharmonia, were hailed as documents of a young genius. There were also Renato Cellini, whose many opera recordings for the label displayed a fine sense of pacing and shaping though the pick-up orchestra he used was scarcely worthy of his talents, and Jonel Perlea, a highly underrated conductor whose 1955 recording of “Aida” still ranks as one of the finest of all time. Then, in 1950, RCA made a coup by signing Fritz Reiner away from Columbia. At first he was featured with pickup orchestras such as the “RCA Victor Symphony,” a group made up of union extras from the New York Philharmonic, Metropolitan Opera and New York City Opera orchestras, and the “Robin Hood Dell Symphony,” which was comprised of members and extras from the Philadelphia Orchestra, but then Reiner was named music director of the Chicago Symphony. From his very first recording session with RCA in 1954, it was obvious that here was a conductor who could replicate the tautness and clarity, if not always the passion and relaxation, of a Toscanini performance. Throughout his eight years with the label, Reiner’s performances were issued with much the same promotional fervor as a Toscanini release, with one difference: RCA never elevated him to the honor of “one-name” status, as they had done with Caruso, Heifetz, Toscanini or Horowitz. Among the finest treasures of Reiner’s association with the label are his first (1954) recording of Strauss’ “Also Sprach Zarathustra,” a performance that has since assumed legendary status, so much so that even Reiner’s own 1960 remake couldn’t compete with it; an equally brilliant reading of the Brahms Piano Concerto No. 1 with Arthur Rubinstein; and his recording of Bartok’s Concerto for Orchestra, the work he commissioned in 1945.



a fantastic 12-inch picture book with green-and-white photos of the actual pines and foun-

But, of course, for the first half of the 1950s RCA still had Toscanini himself, now available in “New Orthophonic High Fidelity Sound”—one of many promotional gimmicks the label concocted to push its records above the competition. During this period, probably since they were still also promoting full-length classical works on their 45-rpm label, RCA’s LP Red Seal label was a particularly dull cranberry color with silver lettering, just like their 45s. It was on this label that they issued the Maestro’s recording of Respighi’s Pines and Fountains of Rome, well-crafted light-classical works with which he had become indelibly associated, in a stunning early version of the deluxe album. The disc was packaged within

tains that the music depicted. Also issued on the cranberry label were his later recordings of the Beethoven symphonies. Some of them, particularly Nos. 6, 7 and 9, were not as fine readings as those he had done in the 1930s with the BBC Symphony, New York Philharmonic and early NBC Symphony, but RCA's promotion touted them as the *sine qua non* of Beethoven conducting. What made this particularly interesting was that, prior to their release, most conductors—including Toscanini—had hitherto used light-voiced lyric sopranos in the 9th



Symphony (Furtwängler had used Tilla Briem, Erna Berger and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Toscanini had used Rina Bovy, Jarmila Novotna and Ann McKnight). But the Toscanini Beethoven 9th, hailed as the definitive performance of the century, created a consumer desire for heavier sopranos in almost all Beethoven 9th recordings that were issued over the next twenty years, among them Gré Brouwenstijn (André Cluytens), Leontyne Price (Charles Munch), Phyllis Curtin (Fritz Reiner), Joan Sutherland (Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt), Martina Arroyo (Leonard Bernstein), Gundula Janowitz and Anna Tomowa-Sintow (Herbert von Karajan).

Also issued on the cranberry Red Seal label was a Furtwängler recording that would become one of the most influential of all time. This was his 1952 performance of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* with Kirsten Flagstad, Blanche Thebom, Ludwig Suthaus, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Josef Griendl, with Legge's Philharmonia Orchestra absolutely glowing and radiant behind the conductor. Even when other, better singers came along on subsequent *Tristan* recordings, this one remained—and to some, still remains—the benchmark on how this opera should be conducted. In retrospect, then, it was a true pity that the conductor did not live to complete his "Ring" cycle for EMI, or that the label did not have the courage to issue either his 1950 La Scala "Ring" or the one he made for Italian Radio in 1953 until twenty years after the conductor's death.

Ironically, this recording also became infamous for two notes *not* sung by Flagstad. These were the two high Cs in the first-act scene known as "Isolde's curse"; the 57-year-old soprano was no longer confident in her high Cs, so Walter Legge "kindly" offered that his wife, soprano Schwarzkopf, should sing them for her. We have no idea why the notes were not simply spliced in but, in any event, Schwarzkopf was actually in the studio when the scene was recorded so that she could sing them "live." After the album was released, Legge allowed the information about his wife's substitution for Flagstad "leak out" to the press, in

order to boost her standing, but Flagstad rightly took it as an insult and a breach of confidence. After this fiasco, she left EMI for Decca Records, where she stayed until her retirement and beyond.

During this period, RCA also copied its old “Heritage Series” label colors of red lettering on gold for a new reissue series, the Red Seal “Collector’s Issue.” Out came all the old best-sellers from the electrical 78 era, among them Fritz Busch’s 1930s Mozart operas and the Kreisler-Rachmaninoff sonata recordings, tricked up with fancy packaging and “tasteful” but glowing promotion. The surprising success of this series eventually led to EMI’s similar “Great Recordings of the Century” series which, since the label had even more legendary performances to draw upon than RCA, did even better in the reissue marketplace.

Of course, all during this early LP era, the various labels were competing fiercely for listener loyalty, even—or especially—in the classical field. Columbia countered some of RCA’s moves by signing an exclusive contract with the Metropolitan Opera, thus turning out the very first full-production opera recordings by this famous American house; as part of this contract, they managed to also promote some excellent recordings by many of its stars, particularly soprano Eleanor Steber and tenor Richard Tucker, both of whom had been with RCA in the ‘40s. Decca started pushing some excellent conductors, not really new, who had simply escaped media attention in the past, such as Ernest Ansermet, and also signed three of the most exciting and dynamic singers of the era in soprano Renata Tebaldi, tenor Mario del Monaco and bass Cesare Siepi. And EMI, not to be left out, was trying to juggle Furtwängler’s fragile ego alongside of Karajan’s gigantic one, as well as pushing some exciting new singing stars of its own, among them soprano Victoria de los Angeles, tenors Giuseppe di Stefano and Nicolai Gedda, and the great actor-bass Boris Christoff. Indeed, Christoff’s 1952 recording of Gounod’s *Faust*, which coincidentally also appeared on the RCA cranberry label, became such a popular seller that EMI was prompted to remake it again in stereo with much the same cast in 1957.



Three new baritones: Gobbi, Fischer-Dieskau, Souzay

Perhaps there were no greater indications that the new LP era would be considerably different artistically from the old 78 era than in the work of three remarkable baritones, one Italian, one German and one French. Each one of them marked a distinct break with earlier singers in the same range and repertoire, and each brought an entirely new, more modern approach to repertoire that had been a staple of singers in their range for about a century.

The oldest of them was Tito Gobbi, often described as the most complex Italian operatic baritone of the 20th century. Vocally, Gobbi was excellent but not terribly different from the many fine baritones who had preceded him; the voice was lighter in timbre, had a wider range of color, but in some ways was not terribly flexible. Where he excelled was in the intense, stark, powerful way he acted a role, both vocally and visually. Those who performed with him, especially in the early post-war years before he became internationally known, were

startled by his Chaliapin-like identification with the characters he sang. Unlike Chaliapin, however, Gobbi offstage was modest and a good colleague who supported the other singers in the cast. In 1945, shortly after Italy was liberated, he appeared in an abridged film version of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* with tenor Ferruccio Tagliavini and bass Italo Tajo. Tagliavini was wooden on camera, but Gobbi skipped around with a joie-de-vivre that was startling for a man of thirty. Two years later, his stock having risen considerably at Milan's La Scala, he appeared in what was probably the first complete filmed opera, Verdi's *Rigoletto*. His fellow-singers in this production, superbly conducted by the often underrated Tullio Serafin, were soprano Lina Pagliughi, tenor Mario Filippeschi and bass Giulio Neri. It was the standard La Scala production of the day, which means fairly stock scenery, costumes and staging, except for two anomalies. One was that Pagliughi, a terribly overweight soprano once cruelly described as "the elephant who swallowed a canary," was replaced onscreen by a much slimmer actress. The other anomaly was Gobbi. His acting is so personal, so riveting, so intense that he stands out from the rest of the cast the way Chaliapin probably did at the Met and Covent Garden. The others are good singers; Gobbi is *Rigoletto*.

The second of these baritones to emerge was Fischer-Dieskau. Like Gobbi, his voice was lighter in texture than those German baritones who preceded him; so light, in fact, that some listeners felt he was a misplaced tenor. Yet he, too, had an insightful quality that reached across the loudspeakers to grab the listener and draw him or her inward. This quality was most evident in lieder, which he sang with a sensitivity that was even greater than that of Gerhard Hüsch, Elena Gerhardt, Karl Erb or Aksel Schiøtz, the great lieder singers who had preceded him. Fischer-Dieskau, in fact, would go on to become the most famous and most-recorded lieder singer in the history of the phonograph. But he was equally excellent in oratorio and concert works, particularly Bach where most of the older German baritones were top-heavy and not sensitive to words; and his word-painting also held him in good stead with certain roles in the operatic repertoire. As time went on and more audiences got the chance to see and hear Fischer-Dieskau in person, they were often disillusioned by the quality of his voice: what sounded attractively bright and resonant in a recording studio sounded dull, grey and unimpressive (though musically and textually sensitive) in person. Fischer-Dieskau, then, was the ultimate "microphone singer" of his generation, a truly great artist—of that there can be no doubt—who simply performed better on records than he did in person.

Souzay was, in some ways, even more revolutionary than the others. The traditions of French *chanson* from the 19th through the mid-20th century demanded that the singer not "interpret" the song at all, as the Germans and Italians did, but simply sing the words clearly and follow the music exactly. This tradition can be heard in the recordings of Charles Panzera, Pierre Bernac, Suzanne Danco and even Maggie Teyte, the Scottish soprano who was adored in France. But Souzay changed all this. He not only interpreted the French songs he sang, but also excelled in some of the German lieder that was the province of Fischer-Dieskau, giving record-buyers (and concert-goers) an alternative to listen to. It was also interesting that they recorded with different labels. Gobbi was an exclusive HMV property while Fischer-Dieskau began with DGG at the beginning of their "yellow tulip" era, moved to EMI for about a decade, then alternated between DGG and Decca for most of the remainder of his recording career. Souzay, on the other hand, started with Decca but after ten years switched to a new player in the international record wars, the Dutch label Philips.

Philips was an interesting entry into the record market. Long known in Europe as a producer of quality lighting and electronic equipment, the advent of the LP. On May 9, 1940 Philips directors were informed about the German invasion of the Netherlands to take place on May 10. They decided to leave the



country and flee to the United States, taking a large amount of the company capital with them. Operating from the US, they managed to run the company throughout the war. At the same time, the company itself was moved to the Netherlands Antilles (on paper) to keep it out of German hands. After the war it was moved back to the Netherlands, with their headquarters in Eindhoven. Many secret research facilities were locked and successfully hidden from the invaders, which allowed the company to get up to speed again quickly after the war.

Their record label began around 1954 in direct competition to Decca and EMI. In the beginning, their roster of artists consisted almost exclusively of Dutch performers, but some of them, like conductor Eduard van Beinum and soprano Gré Brouwenstijn, became internationally known. In 1960 they signed a contract with Mercury to release their records in the U.S., but by 1963 they became an independent label once again.

Even more confusing is the convoluted path that EMI took in its relationships with American labels. Up until 1951 they were issuing their records in the U.S. on two labels, Columbia and RCA Victor; then they severed ties with American Columbia, which deprived the label of EMI's many Sir Thomas Beecham LPs. But in 1953 they also severed ties with RCA Victor, creating instead their "Angel" label for American distribution, though they *also* continued to issue symphonic and opera recordings on the Capitol label!

The musical satirists: Jones, Katz, Freberg

At about the time that the jazz, classical and pop markets were changing—some for the good, others for the worse—there were on the scene three remarkably funny and musically astute satirists who lampooned music of virtually all styles and kept audiences in stitches. In retrospect, much of their humor seems crude, even childish, but the underlying principles of their satires remain funny because they were all excellent and creative musicians.

Lindley "Spike" Jones was the first, wildest, and most wide-ranging of them all. A former studio drummer in Hollywood, Jones and singer-clarinetist Del Porter started his band, the City Slickers, in 1941. Their earliest recordings were somewhat tepid, but in 1942 Jones scored a monster hit with "Der Fuehrer's Face," a scathing satire of Adolf Hitler (for which he earned the honor of being on Hitler's personal hit list). But it was after the war, in 1945, that Jones really hit his stride with a complex musical parody of the hit song "Cocktails for Two." This was followed by such sequels as "Love in Bloom" and "I'm Getting Sentimental Over You," and then by such outré parodies as "Hawaiian War Chant," "Chloe," "My Old Flame" and "Laura." But Jones also lampooned classical music, playing and recording bizarre but funny versions of "Liebestraum," the "William Tell Overture," "Dance of the Hours," Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite and even Bizet's opera *Carmen*. The lampoons were indeed very funny, but some observers noted that creating an audience for satirized classics would endanger an appreciation for the real thing. Jones himself didn't think so, and in fact even as late as 1959 he was still lampooning classical music, but in a way what was predicted did come true.

Mickey Katz, now studied by Klezmer revivalists, was in fact the Spike Jones of Klezmer. He took the elements of the music, exaggerated them comically, and added his own



funny vocals full of glugs, gulps and hiccups to both classical (Khachaturian's "Sabre Dance") and popular music. He started out as a member of Jones' band, replacing Carl Grayson who had been dismissed due to his chronic alcoholism, but left because he felt that his input was not as well-liked. Perhaps Jones found his very obvious Jewishness a commercial liability, but in any event Katz' Klezmer parodies were the death-knell for Klezmer in America. In postwar America, American Jews were distancing themselves from the culture of their parents and grandparents; they were becoming more Caucasian in appearance, speech and cultural attitudes, so to them the not-so-subtle parodies of provincial Jewishness such as Katz' and Jerry Lewis' were a way of exorcising these elements of their own culture. Of course, Katz was a comedian and was just being funny, yet it is interesting that his son changed his last name to "Gray" and only made one record of such provincial Yiddish songs as "Rumania, Rumania."

Stan Freberg, a radio actor during the 1940s, struck out on his own in the early 1950s and became one of the most popular and influential musical satirists of all time. His musical lampoons circumvented the more obvious squeals, trumpet blasts, slurs and hiccups of Jones and Katz, yet they were still very funny. What was interesting was that Freberg took specific aim at the burgeoning R&B and rock-and-roll market. As a lover of jazz he, like many other adults of his generation, could not believe that anyone, even teenagers, could possibly enjoy this type of music or take it seriously. Among his many spoofs were brilliant ones of Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel" and the Platters' "The Great Pretender," as well as a more generalized one called "Rock Around Stephen Foster" in which he took such popular ballads as "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair" and "Camptown Races," jacked up the tempo, added blaring horns, electric guitars and moronic riffs, and screamed his way through the songs. Older adults were indeed delighted, but teenagers hated Freberg. Future rock record producer Phil Spector, in particular, thought him cruel and demeaning. As the rock music industry grew and became the dominant musical culture, Freberg retreated from musical parody and turned his immense talents to advertising.

The Björling-Merrill duets: A tribute to phonography

In the fall of 1950, following the extraordinary success of Verdi's "Don Carlo" at the Metropolitan Opera, Jussi Björling and baritone Robert Merrill recorded the Act 1 aria/duet scene, "Io l'ho perduta...Dio, che nell'alma infondere" for RCA Victor. The record was such a tremendous success that in January 1951 RCA contracted them to record four more duets to make a short, 10-inch LP album. The duets chosen were from "La Bohème," "La Forza del Destino," "Les Pêcheurs de Perles" and "Otello," of which Björling only sang the first opera in his stage appearances.

Though he had a smaller, less imposing voice, Björling always felt the shadow of Enrico Caruso over him. He sang many of the Neapolitan's famous roles, including "Il Trovatore" and "Pagliacci," and in the 1940s made a recording of one of Caruso's greatest showpieces, Tosti's song "L'alba separa dalla luce l'ombra." In order to simulate Caruso's power, Björling had himself miked very closely and pumped his voice up as much as he could. In approaching the more formal music of Verdi and Bizet, also identified with the great tenor, he wanted to simulate some of the best former recordings of those duets. Caruso had recorded all three yet, interestingly, Björling chose not to emulate Caruso on the "Forza" duet, "Solenne in quest'ora," because Caruso had purposely under-sung this music. Instead, he used as a model the 1941 recording by Galliano Masini in the complete performance made for Cetra, omitting Masini's sobs but otherwise emulating his more "outward" vocalization, including a

slight elongation and crescendo on the sustained high B-flats. But he was most frightened of “Si, pel ciel” from “Otello.” In his autobiography, Merrill recalled that Björling walked around and around the block, talking to himself, for half an hour before getting up the nerve to enter the recording studio. He was still not sure that he could do justice to the music, but he gave all he had. To the best of my knowledge, these are the first records made by an established classical artist to consciously imitate the phrasing and interpretation of an earlier one.

Norman Granz and his labels

The musical and cultural changes happening to jazz in the postwar years were most accurately, and commercially, captured on disc by a young impresario named Norman Granz who became the Walter Legge of that music. Frustrated by the lack of venues for jazz outside the clubs, feeling that true jazz thrived best in a “jam session” atmosphere rather than in pre-formulated swing arrangements, and having both the capital and opportunity to do something about it, he created an entirely new phenomenon, the traveling jazz show. Since he originally used Philharmonic Hall in Los Angeles for his first concerts, this touring group soon became known as “Jazz at the Philharmonic” or JATP for short. JATP rounded up the most prestigious and famous names in jazz, put them together, and let them take turns improvising. The problem with JATP concerts was that there were sometimes *too* many musicians on the dates, and that some of those musicians really didn’t go together stylistically. But JATP created a market for extended recordings of jam sessions, something that quite simply didn’t exist before. At first, Granz sold his master tapes to established labels such as Decca and Mercury, but as his name became more well-known (both labels put “Norman Granz Presents” on the album covers), he struck out on his own, first with the Clef label and then with Verve, which absorbed Clef.

Among the many musicians who Granz gave their heart and heads to were trumpeters Buck Clayton and Roy Eldridge, trombonist Tommy Turk, saxophonists Flip Phillips, Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins and Willie Smith, and pianists Ken Kersey and Hank Jones. Yet he is best remembered for his work with Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday and Art Tatum, each of whom were treated in different ways.

“Bird” Parker was, of course, the most talented of the modern jazz musicians, but his heroin habit had made him unreliable and difficult to deal with. Granz put him in extraordinary jazz contexts that he had never been involved in before, such as his recordings of Latin music with Machito and his orchestra and small-group sessions with such like-minded individuals as Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk and drummer Roy Haynes. But he also put Bird into commercial surroundings, with oboes, vocal groups and strings. Some of these were directed by the rather tasteless Mitch Miller, then a mainstay at Mercury, but most were not. Bird himself loved recording with strings because he liked their sound behind him and because he felt that they lent his playing the air of legitimacy, something then lacking from jazz especially in clubs. Some of these records were heavily criticized in the jazz press, but other musicians were influenced by and enjoyed them.

With Billie Holiday, his focus was different. Decca was already recording her in more formal commercial contexts, so he issued live recordings that she made at his JATP concerts. These presented record-buyers with an earthier, less formal Holiday, much closer to her roots as a jazz and not just as a pop artist; but like Parker, she enjoyed recording with strings and winds, and so returned to that context whenever she could.

Yet Granz has received special praise, even immortality, for his work with Tatum. Sporadically recorded throughout his career, usually in restrictive three-minute performances to fit the 78-rpm records, Tatum was invited to come to the studio and “just play” whatever he wanted to—his whole repertoire, if he liked. Tatum responded with four incredible marathon sessions, the first two made on consecutive days in December 1953, in which he recorded no less than sixty-nine performances, ranging from two and a half to six minutes in length. Here, Tatum was allowed to stretch out when he felt the urge to, adding extra dimension to his art in a way unheard-of in the days of 78s. But Granz did not stop there. In addition to the solo piano performances, Granz recorded Tatum in group settings with such stars as vibist Lionel



Hampton, clarinetist Buddy De Franco, trumpeter Roy Eldridge, bassist Red Callender and saxists Ben Webster and Benny Carter. The Carter session was made in June 1954, the rest in the last year and a half of Tatum’s life, from March 1955 to September 1956. Never before, or since, has any jazz artist been accorded this kind of treatment—completely artistic, not considering commercial sales at all, and focusing on the complete repertoire of a solitary artist. The fifteen CDs that these recordings fill today were initially released as some twenty-four LPs, first by Clef, then by Verve, then by Verve’s successor, Pablo records. Moreover, they have *never* been out of print since the time of their initial release.

In a way, the Tatum-Granz sessions represented an apex as well as an apotheosis of jazz. Without any commercial structure to them, the Tatum recordings were presented as Art, which they were; but they also divorced jazz from popular music in a way that had not existed before, even in the records of Gillespie and Parker, who made several popular concessions.

The birth of cool

Parallel with the development of Bebop was the initiation of a new strain in jazz. Fostered by such sensitive artists as Young, Red Norvo, Sauter and Miles Davis, informed by the French school of classicists, and coalesced by the formation of groups of like-minded musicians in the late 1940s, this new strain was soon dubbed “cool” jazz. In a way the title was a misnomer, since several of the “cool” jazz groups swung as hard, or harder, than their bop counterparts; but the moniker was as much a designation of the kind of tone the musicians produced as it was the overall impact of their jazz.

Aside from such earlier artists as Young and Norvo, the first musician whose work was decidedly “cool” was Nathaniel Adams Cole, known to the world as “King.” In his case, unlike Goodman’s, the title of King was not meant to designate his superiority on his chosen instrument, though he was one of the most original and influential pianists who ever lived; it was merely a pun on the old nursery rhyme. The King Cole Trio was first recorded for Victor, near the end of the fabulous run of small-group performances headed by Lionel Hampton. After a flirtation with two small labels, they were signed by fledgling Capitol in 1943 and never strayed to another label again. Indeed, in some ways the ascent of Capitol was due largely to the extraordinary popular ascent of Nat King Cole. From 1942 to 1946, he and his

drummerless trio, which featured the astounding Django-influenced electric guitar of Oscar Moore, shot to the top of the charts in a way that no other trio had ever done before. They were so popular, in fact, that a large number of pianists, including Herman Chittison and even Tatum himself, switched to the piano-guitar-bass format pioneered by Cole. But Cole's popularity was not due to his piano alone. He was one of the warmest, most sensitive vocalists in jazz history—the opposite in power from Frankie Laine, yet even more able to caress a lyric and phrase sensitively. In 1946 he recorded one of the oddest songs ever written, “Nature Boy,” written by a nomadic beachcomber named Eden Ahbez. The performance featured Cole alone with a string orchestra conducted by Frank DeVol. The record sold three million copies, put Nat Cole on the same commercial block as Crosby and Sinatra, and pointed to the eventual demise of the Trio, which indeed faded to the role of occasional accompanist until it was disbanded in 1950.

Unlike Laine, however, Cole never really lost his jazz phrasing or interest as his pop career skyrocketed. Even as late as 1963, performing at The Sands in Las Vegas, he could still sit at the piano and play “Where or When” with as much jazz feeling and improvisatory genius as if the Trio had never ended. But Cole was haunted throughout his pop career by jazz critics who accused him of “selling out,” of abandoning the music he had served so well. This was the first time a jazz musician had truly crossed over in such a way that he was able to not only influence, but create, a new genre: the “pop-jazz” artist in the true sense of the word. Such recordings as “Nature Boy,” “Mona Lisa” (made with a string quartet and guitar), “Stardust” (with a Gordon Jenkins arrangement that remains his masterpiece) and “Too Young” elevated pop treacle to the heights of art song. The musical form and chord changes remained what they were, simplistic and somewhat conventional, but Cole's treatment was inimitable. To this day, there are few if any artists who will even attempt these songs because of their reverence for the Cole recordings.

If Cole was an artist who consciously sought and achieved pop fame, however, none of the other “cool” jazz musicians had such aims. Perhaps the fountainhead of the new style, in terms of artistic high-mindedness, was pianist Lennie Tristano. Blind since early childhood, Tristano was an extraordinarily talented pianist who, because he was white, could easily have entered the classical concert world. But Tristano heard more possibilities in jazz—or, rather, he heard in jazz the possibilities of greater creative freedom than he found in more structured, pre-written classical music. He recorded prolifically between 1946 and 1952, but then dropped out of sight to become a teacher, performing only occasionally henceforth. But his records, even the early, more obscure ones made for the small Keynote label, were highly influential, taking Tatum's penchant for fractioning time to new heights and creating what became known as “free” jazz, music improvised on a mere thread of melody and a few chord changes.

At around the time Tristano appeared, another white pianist came on the scene whose musical sensibilities were also formed by classical music, but the more emotionally effusive classical music of the French school. This was Dave Brubeck, whose small-group recordings with such musicians as alto saxist Paul Desmond and vibist Cal Tjader were informed by the lessons Brubeck had learned from his teacher, none other than composer Darius Milhaud. Eventually Brubeck reduced his forces from octet and sextet to quartet, settling on the instrumentation of alto-piano-bass-drums which became one of the most popular and influential cool groups in jazz.

In 1949 trumpeter Miles Davis teamed up with pianist John Lewis and two extraordinary white musicians, baritone saxist-composer Gerry Mulligan and arranger Gil Evans, to create a nonet which he called the “Birth of the Cool” band. Finally, the music had its name,

and the dozen recordings they made went much further to influence the coming trends in jazz than their miniscule number of live performances. The Birth of the Cool band was gone by late 1950, yet their discs, especially “Venus de Milo,” “God-child” and “Jeru,” became jazz classics that influenced an entire generation.

One of the bands in which the cool style germinated was the 1947-48 orchestra of Woody Herman, spawning such giants of the music as trumpeter-arranger Shorty Rogers, tenor saxist Stan Getz, pianist-arranger Ralph Burns and baritone saxist Serge Chaloff. Chaloff died of a drug overdose in the early 1950s, but the others grew and expanded their style to such a point that they eventually converted even such boppers as Hawkins and Gillespie to the new style. Rogers, in particular, achieved a sort of popularity that confounded experts and critics. Without in the least pandering to commercial tastes, as Parker and Cole had done, Rogers and his Giants—variously described as either a large jam group or a small orchestra—recorded a series of albums for Capitol, Pacific Jazz and RCA Victor in the early-to-mid 1950s that sold extremely well *and* created new innovations in the music. Unfortunately for jazz, he became so popular that he was lured away from the music by Hollywood, where he wrote some excellent film scores but virtually disappeared from the vanguard.

Another musician who went much the same way was arranger Quincy Jones, one of the very few jazz musicians who studied with the legendary Nadia Boulanger. Jones created some exquisite scores for Lionel Hampton’s early-’50s orchestra, then went on to write and conduct an album called “That’s How I Feel About Jazz.” But Quincy apparently didn’t feel *that* strongly about jazz, for by the late 1950s he, too, went into film writing, and eventually into fusion and funk. He is much better known today for his film music for “Shaft” and a fusion piece called “Rockit” than he is for his jazz work of the 1950s.

Gerry Mulligan, fortunately, continued to grow and develop within the cool school in several different and interesting ways. Among these was the formation of a pianoless quartet that played in San Francisco in the early 1950s.

This was the group that catapulted trumpeter Chet Baker to fame and even a sort of peripheral pop career via his versions of the song “My Funny Valentine.” But Baker, like so many jazzers of his era, was addicted to heroin, and he eventually fizzled in the early 1960s while Mulligan continued to grow, writing some extremely subtle arrangements for Stan Kenton and eventually forming a concert band in 1960 that won both jazz awards and a highly loyal following during their short career.

Miles Davis, Mulligan’s former bandmate, was also a king of cool. He would go on from strength to strength during the 1950s, eventually forming a band in 1955 that included such superb



musicians as tenor saxist John Coltrane, pianist Red Garland, bassist Paul Chambers and drummer Philly Joe Jones. They were so good, in fact, that Davis finally graduated from such small jazz labels as Prestige, Fantasy and Debut to prestigious Columbia, where baritone saxist Teo Macero had become the label's new jazz A&R man. Davis, along with Brubeck, would come to dominate the cool world during the early stereo era via his recordings with pianist Bill Evans and arranger Gil Evans (no relation)—but that is for another chapter.

Bassist-composer Charles Mingus, who had always had an interest in classical forms anyway, also became an early convert to the cool school. He studied for a time with none other than Tristano before striking out on his own to produce three years' worth of alternately cool and bop-influenced music for his own record label, Debut. Eventually, Mingus would burst out of the formal restrictions of cool jazz to create an entirely new sound-world based on Gospel music and blues shouts, but that was still in the future when he recorded such Tristano-influenced pieces as "Extrasensory Perception," "Eclipse," "Precognition," "Gregarian Chant" and "Montage." In a sense, his more freewheeling pieces of the 1960s and beyond always had the underlying structure of cool jazz if not their overall feel.

Yet in a way, the stars of the cool style were the members of the Modern Jazz Quartet (MJQ). Founded by pianist John Lewis in 1953, they were the first all-black jazz band to play in an emotionally restrictive style. Focusing on color and form rather than freewheeling excitement, the MJQ stayed together for a quarter-century, defying musical and social trends in a long and highly-admired series of recordings and performances. All four of their members (Lewis, vibist Milt Jackson, bassist Percy Heath and drummer Connie Kay, who replaced original drummer Kenny Clarke before the quartet's first year was out) could and did play in other jazz venues, but their highly disciplined, integrated style as the MJQ caught an entire world by surprise. No longer could anyone claim that "jazz" was inferior to "classical." They were now perceived as being mirror-images of the same musical world.

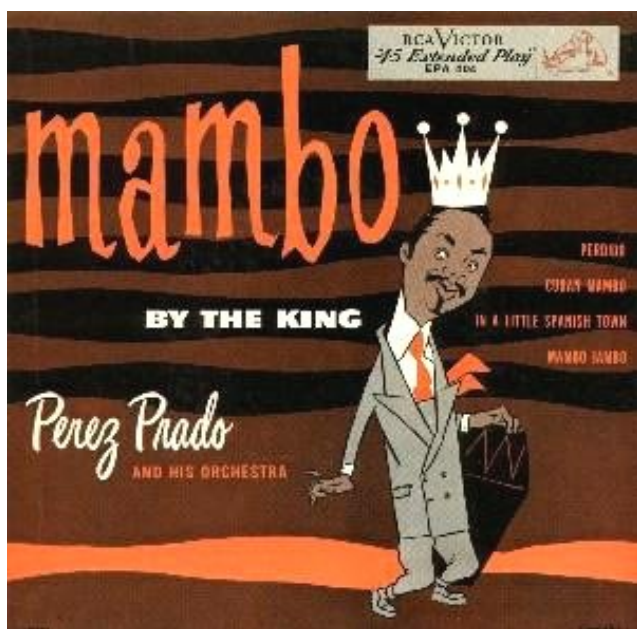


Cubano Be, Cubano Bop: the emergence of Latin jazz

All the while cool jazz was emerging, there was an undercurrent of interest in Latin music, particularly as it related to jazz. The first musician to take advantage of this fusion was Dizzy Gillespie, whose big band of 1947-49 included the incendiary bongo drummer Luciano "Chano" Pozo. Pozo was a firebrand of exceptional talent, and his playing on such Gillespie recordings as "Manteca," "Good Bait" and especially George Russell's composition "Cubano Be, Cubano Bop" cut across racial and cultural lines like a knife. The Latin sound was one reason the Gillespie band was able to cling to an RCA recording contract while Parker and Monk struggled with independents. The Latin sound was so influential that even Stan Kenton and Nat Cole recorded with bongo players into the early 1950s.

Yet it was an authentic Latin bandleader who managed to cross over into the pop market and inflame an entire world with his music. This was Perez Prado, a Cuban-born pianist and arranger, who took the basic Kenton band sound, modified its continual screaming, simplified or omitted the jazz solos and created an ensemble sound based primarily on the

mambo. He first caught the attention of RCA Victor when his band started touring Mexico in 1948-49; signed to a contract with the label, RCA put out Prado records on their purple-label “international” series. Yet it was in 1953 that Prado’s band burst on the public consciousness like an explosion from another world. The catalyst was his recording of a popular Mexican song, “Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White,” in mambo time.



Within months, Prado became the hottest thing on the planet. As record followed record—“Que Rico Mambo,” “Spanish Taxi,” “La Nia Popof,” “Ay Cosita Linda,” “In a Little Spanish Town” and the extraordinarily popular “Patricia”—Prado didn’t even bother giving his tunes real names, using such monikers as Mambo No. 5, 6, 7 and 8. (5 and 8 became smash hits as well.) Before long, mambo was a national craze. People had mambo parties, wore “mambo sleeves,” and drank tequila and lime. Even such pop icons as Perry Como and Rosemary Clooney had to record mambo songs. Eventually it fizzled, but it left a lasting impression: Latin music was hot, vigorous, even sexy. No one would ever be happy

with listening to Sammy Kaye or Guy Lombardo ever again—at least, not until Lawrence Welk became a TV phenomenon.

The development of folk music

All the while these innovations were going on in jazz, however, the folk music collected and dispersed via records and the radio by the Lomaxes was starting to influence our culture as well. By the late 1940s, Woody Guthrie was again an itinerant musician, traversing the country and playing when and where he pleased, but Leadbelly was becoming a folk legend. In 1949, the last year of his life, Capitol signed him to an exclusive contract, issuing songs such as “Goodnight, Irene” and “Rock Island Line” that would eventually become the cornerstones of the burgeoning folk movement.

Folk music had always attracted serious-minded listeners much more than jazz, which was considered noisy, formless and of little consequence. Even Peter Seeger’s stepmother, Ruth Crawford, had abandoned her brilliant career as one of America’s finest composers to help her son and husband collect folk music. Firmly believing that it would inspire and influence future generations of composers, she meticulously collected and wrote about the recordings of obscure performers. And a great many classical fans, such as Robert Sherman who would later host the folk program “Woody’s Children” on the prestigious classical radio station WQXR, fell under the spell of folk music’s charms.

In 1948 bass Lee Hays, who had sung with Guthrie in the loosely-organized Almanac Singers, decided to form a more permanent group to perform the music of Guthrie and Leadbelly. Originally the plan was to have three men and three women of mixed race to promote racial as well as class harmony, but in the end The Weavers was a quartet of three men and one woman, all white. The charismatic Seeger became a part of this group, but the real vocal

star was Ronnie Gilbert, whose rich, powerful mezzo voice set a standard rarely matched in the next quarter-century in which folk music was popular. They made their first recordings, heavily orchestrated by Gordon Jenkins, for Decca in 1950. The label didn't think there



would be much of a market for them, but their very first single release—"Goodnight, Irene" coupled with "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena"—not only shot to the top of the pop charts but stayed there for two full months. This was followed by other records that not only established the Weavers as the best and most influential of all folk groups but also put such formerly obscure songs as "Wimoweh" and "Kisses Sweeter Than Wine" in the public consciousness. They even recorded such "old-timey" folk songs as "On Top of Old Smokey," which created a market for cheery, chubby Burl Ives who followed them on the Decca label as hit maker once the Weavers were released because of their Communist affiliations.

In the late 1940s, a New Yorker named Moses Asch, infatuated by the growing interest in folk music, started a new independent label called Folkways. His precepts were simple: if you wanted to record, he would record you, but you were only paid a one-time fee, no royalties. The trade-off was that your record would remain in print forever. Bizarre as this arrangement seemed, many folk artists—including such stars as Guthrie, Leadbelly, Cisco Houston and Blind Sonny Terry—recorded prolifically for him for one reason. He was honest and kept his word. But Asch lost several of his stars to bigger labels, illness or death by 1952, so he began looking for worthy records to reissue. One of his most interesting if peripheral series was his "history of jazz," which took old commercial recordings from a number of sources—Victor and Columbia in addition to Gennett, Paramount, Okeh and Savoy—to show the history of jazz as a "folk art" music from the early 1920s through the early bebop era. Oddly enough, the major labels didn't bother to sue him, probably because he had poor distribution and didn't use enough of their old records to bother them.

In 1951, Asch ran into Harry Smith, a man who could be best described as a wandering artist. Coming from a poor family, having little or nothing but his insatiable curiosity and a razor-sharp mind, he created an entirely new genre with hand-painted films. His short but brilliant versions of "The Wizard of Oz" and Kurt Weill's "Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny" are considered masterpieces. But Smith was an unfocused talent with a strong addiction to alcohol and marijuana. Unable to work in a normal occupation, always trying to trade in his brilliance for drink or rent money, he was as much an annoyance as he was a man of genuine artistic genius.

And Harry Smith was also a record collector, particularly of folk, blues and country recordings made between 1926 and 1942. When he wasn't buying film or liquor, he was sinking what little money he had into his record collection. When he moved from California to New York City in 1950, he had his records and his artwork shipped out east. He lost most of the art but managed to get his record collection intact—no small feat for several hundred pounds of shellac discs. In 1951, desperate for rent money, he approached Moe Asch and offered to sell him what he described as "the cream of the crop" for reissue on Asch's Folkways label. Asch realized that this strange-looking but brilliant man knew exactly who these per-

formers were and the value of the performances themselves, and so he agreed to put out three volumes of “American Folk Music” under Smith’s name provided that he write the liner notes. Smith agreed, and a legendary series of LPs was born.

Goddard Lieberson and the rebirth of Columbia

Encouraged by their development of the LP and the new market that the disc created, Columbia promoted Goddard Lieberson, one of their classical promotion gurus and a former composer himself, to the head position of their classical department. Lieberson revamped the Masterworks label in his own image, and in doing so created a legendary series of recordings that are still having an impact today.

One of his first moves was to sign Igor Stravinsky to record his own works for them—ALL of his works. This was to be a project of significant, far-reaching proportions as the 1950s gave way to the 1960s. It began with a mono recording of his great opera-oratorio “Oedipus Rex” in 1950, with soprano Astrid Varnay and tenor Peter Pears, and ended with his opera “The Rake’s Progress” in 1966. Following that coup, Lieberson hired a young, relatively unknown conductor named Robert Craft to record the complete works of the New Vienna School’s best composers, Anton Webern and Arnold Schoenberg—again, complete. The Webern project was finished relatively early, since it only took up a few LPs, but the Schoenberg series again stretched into the 1960s and consumed many volumes.

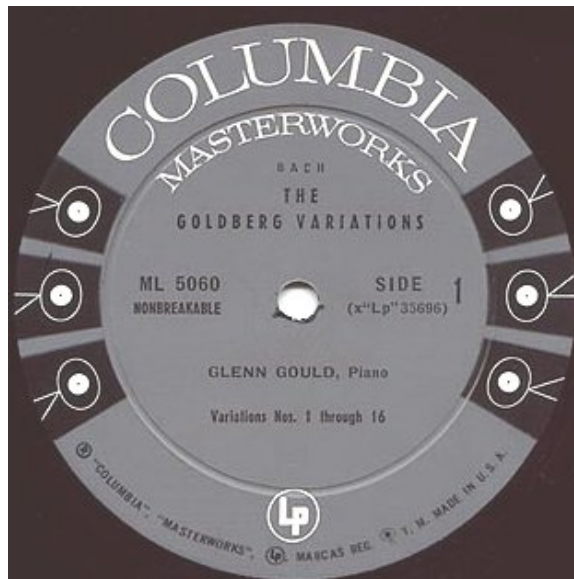
But Lieberson didn’t stop there. He made the first complete recording of Gershwin’s controversial pop-opera “Porgy and Bess,” then signed the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra to an exclusive contract. He already had such stars as soprano Lily Pons on the label; now he signed sopranos Eleanor Steber and Eileen Farrell, tenor Richard Tucker and baritones Giuseppe Valdengo and Frank Valentino—both favorite singers of Toscanini—away from rival RCA. He signed conductor Dmitri Mitropoulos to record the first complete version of Alban Berg’s operatic masterpiece “Wozzeck,” then combined Steber and Mitropoulos in the first-ever complete recording of Berlioz’ “Les Nuits d’Ete.” He recorded Schoenberg’s thorny opera “Moses und Aron,” then followed with a series of Metropolitan-approved opera recordings featuring their own orchestra, chorus and conductors: “Lucia di Lammermoor,” “Faust,” “Cosi fan Tutte,” “Madame Butterfly,” “La Bohème.” He signed an up-and-coming African-American soprano named Leontyne Price to record Samuel Barber’s “Hermit Songs,” then followed with Steber singing the same composer’s “Knoxville: Summer of 1915.” By the mid-1950s, Columbia was not just a major player in the classical field; it was, for perhaps the first time in their history, a leader in certain music.

Yet such innovation was not greeted with enthusiasm by all. Most classical record-buyers, while admitting the beauties of Berlioz and Barber, still could not come to grips with Webern and only a little bit with Schoenberg. Critic Henry Pleasants wrote a famous book, “The Agony of Modern Music,” in which he virtually threw out the baby with the bath water. It also didn’t help that such influential conductors as Toscanini (RCA), Karajan (EMI) and Ansermet (Decca-London) agreed with Pleasants. Not one of them would even touch any of the twelve-tone repertoire, and only peripherally any music with tonal ambiguity.

But Lieberson didn’t much care. Like few others of his time and place, he was no longer making records for “just” the present, he was making them for posterity. He had missed signing Schoenberg himself because of the composer’s death in 1951, but he had Stravinsky and one of the finest Vienna school interpreters in Craft. He also upgraded the look of the label from the bland dark-blue look of the 1940s to the more familiar gray-and-black Masterworks logo. And, in 1955, he signed a phenomenal young pianist from Canada, Glenn

Gould, who would become one of the greatest and most influential artists of all time.

Gould was idiosyncratic in many ways. He liked to perform sitting on a chair rather than a piano bench. He played music in a skeletal fashion, similar to Schnabel but with even more emphasis on the left hand. He was enamored of Bach more so than Beethoven. He was a charismatic performer, young and vital, who drew his audiences inward. And he was passionately dedicated to records as an art form in themselves. Unlike previous performers, who saw records as a necessary nuisance, Gould saw them as a way of not only preserving his art but also as a form of direct communication with his unseen audience. He was convinced that record-listening would supplant the concert hall in thirty years, and was determined to be one of the catalysts in bringing their demise about. He was mistaken, as he sometimes was in his choices of tempo and phrasing, but overall he was a genius who brought to music a fresh approach and a vital, almost demonic energy to his performances. His 1955 recording of Bach's Goldberg Variations was a best-seller from the moment of its release, finally putting Columbia ahead of its rivals in terms of classical selling power.



The early music revolution

The advent of the LP proved to be a bonanza for the recording of a repertoire only marginally touched, if at all, by earlier performers. “Early music,” music written between the 12th and 17th centuries, was virtually unknown to most music-lovers, despite L'Oiseau-Lyre's old recording of Monteverdi's “L'Orfeo.”

The question was, how to perform it? There were three schools of thought. One, which had its basis in Great Britain, was to play it much the same as later classical music, with modern instruments, plenty of legato, and big voices to sing it. This was the theory behind the EMI recording of Purcell's “Dido and Aeneas” in 1952 with none other than Kirsten Flagstad and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf as Dido and Belinda, and it remained the British approach throughout the rest of the decade. Another, which had its basis in Germany, was to return not only to smaller-sized orchestras but “authentic instruments,” the old viols and viola da gambas that earlier composers used. The problems here were that such instruments no longer existed, and when they did they had an excruciatingly bad sound. In 1954 DGG introduced its Archiv label as a repository for ancient music. One of their first recordings was that of Monteverdi's “L'Orfeo” featuring a then-unknown tenor named Fritz Wunderlich. Wunderlich sang beautifully, but the orchestra behind him was a horror: off-key, scratchy, without grace or musical flow. But it was a beginning.

By the late 1950s, a new group which was to become a continuing sound laboratory for early music performance was founded in Austria. This was the Concentus Musicus Wien, led by violinist-musicologist Nikolaus Harnoncourt. At first their performances and recordings were almost as scratchy and graceless as the DGG Archiv “L'Orfeo,” but in time they became a highly polished ensemble whose performances of early music became a standard by which others were judged. In the meantime, other Teutonic conductors and their cousins proceeded

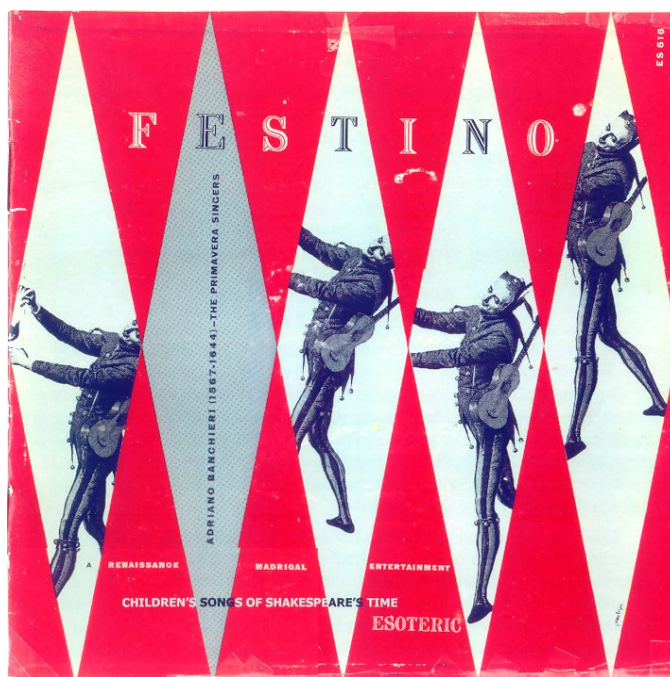
along the lines of compromise: smallish ensembles playing with clarity and precision, trimming the “romantic fat,” as it were, from early music performance. These included such conductors as Helmuth Rilling, Johannes Somary and Aksel Schiøtz’ old friend, Mögens Wøldike, who sometimes used the former tenor (now a baritone) on some of his Bach recordings. This “middle path” found a ready audience among critics and listeners, and in fact became the predominant early music style on discs throughout the 1950s, ‘60s and early ‘70s.

But for even earlier music – music of the Middle Ages and Renaissance which was virtually an uncharted course in both live performance and recordings – it was an American rather than a European group that led the way. This was the New York Pro Musica Antiqua, founded in 1952 by a passionately devoted lone-wolf musicologist who had been a Merchant Marine, Union leader and a Trotsky Communist through the 1930s and ‘40s. His name was Noah Greenberg.

At the time he founded the Pro Musica, Greenberg was working part-time constructing apartment rooms with drywall as well as selling wire recorders on the side. This unlikely and complex personality, despite a spotty formal education, had kept ties with some of the most interesting and innovative musicologists of his time, men who were digging into the secrets of past music and its performance practices as they understood them. During the first ten years of the Pro Musica’s existence, performance practice changed drastically as more new (old) information was gathered. Greenberg kept up with it all, meantime arranging the group’s concert and recording schedule, finding summer retreats where they could meticulously rehearse new material, and finding venues in and out of New York where they could perform. It was almost too overwhelming an occupation, and in time Greenberg became both pragmatic and dictatorial in his approach to the group and their music, but for a few years they were an enthusiastic, uninhibited group of musicians and singers who had a passion and zeal for the material they were discovering, and singing, that transcended whatever historical problems or anachronistic inaccuracies they encountered.

Following the example of Nadia Boulanger’s group, the Pro Musica was founded originally to make records before moving into the realm of live performance. Their first recording was a Renaissance entertainment, “Festino,” written by the Olivetan Monk Adriano Banchieri in 1608. This was certainly not the kind of music that would be considered “salable,” then or now, by any major label, but Greenberg was able to persuade independent record producer Jerry Newman to let him record the piece for his new label, Esoteric Records. The original Pro Musica consisted of sopranos Ruth Daigon and Lois Roman, contralto Sheila Jones, tenor Arthur Squires, bass Brayton Lewis and a particularly unusual high tenor who could sing easily up into the mezzo-soprano range, Russell Oberlin.

Oberlin, who always described himself as “a high Irish tenor like John McCormack,” had been an in-demand freelance vocalist ever since graduating from college in the late 1940s.

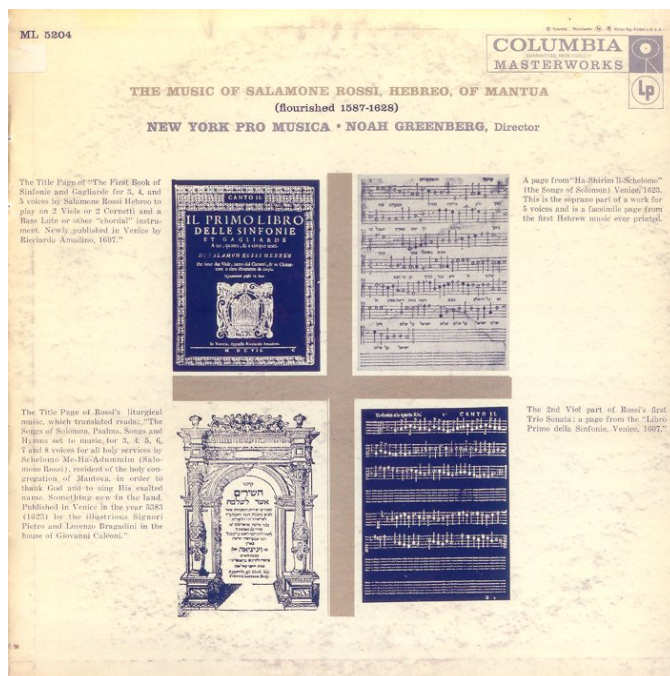


At one point he was a contracted tenor soloist for the newly-formed Robert Shaw Chorale, which would also become a major force in the early-music revival years hence. He even free-lanced as a background singer when Edith Piaf made her American tours. But it was when Greenberg hounded him to join the phantom recording group that became the Pro Musica that his unique talents emerged. During the rehearsals for “Festino,” contralto Jones found it hard to sing the high-lying lines for her. Oberlin modestly suggested that *he* could sing them for

her, and did so. Thus in one inspired moment of risk-taking, Oberlin moved his fach up from that of “high Irish tenor” to that of a true countertenor – a male voice that sang in the alto range without the use of falsetto, such as was already being done in England by Alfred Deller.

The clear, haunting, high voice of Russell Oberlin became the Pro Musica’s trademark. A year later Charles Bressler, another high tenor who did not quite have Oberlin’s range, also joined the group to record John Blow’s “Ode on the Death of Mr. Henry Purcell,” yet another non-commercial project that Newman agreed to promote. During the rehearsals Bressler, who could also go quite high up the staff, was astounded by Oberlin’s range. Though Bressler’s voice, though distinctive, never had quite the ethereal beauty of Oberlin’s, they became a “countertenor duo” that Greenberg used to great effect in a number of pieces tailored for one, the other, or both of them.

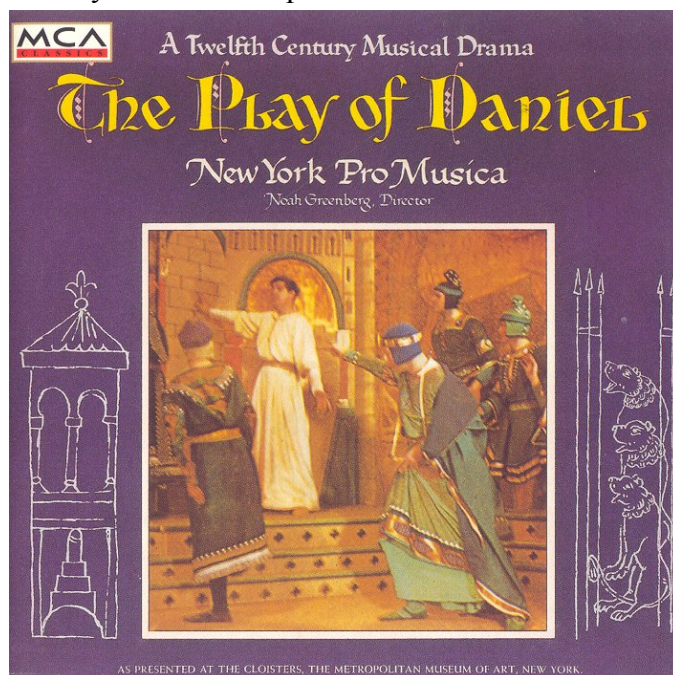
Before long, Newman had three different labels turning out early-music records by the Pro Musica: Esoteric, Counterpoint, and Expériences Anonymes. This last-named was reserved for some of the most unusual and esoteric works of the early music repertoire, among them troubadour and trouvère songs, English mediaeval ballads, and the 13th-century “Cantigas de Santa Maria” written by the Spanish



King Alfonso el Sabio. On these recordings, Oberlin was presented as a solo artist, divorced from the Pro Musica. They did much to promote interest in the music and made Oberlin a sort of “underground” recording star among cognoscenti, but they also angered Greenberg who was not happy about his star countertenor making records without the group. Indeed, the

Pro Musica had become so much of a local sensation that they were contracted by Goddard Lieberson of Columbia to make three albums in 1955-56. The most popular of the three was an album of vocal music of Monteverdi, which featured still-unsurpassable renditions of “Zefiro torna,” “Chiome d’oro” and “Interrotte speranze” by the duo of Oberlin and Bressler, but the album Greenberg was proudest of was “The Music of Salamone Rossi, Hebreo of Mantua.” This was a landmark disc, reviving music that was completely unknown even to many experts, Italian music of the Renaissance written by a Jewish composer.

Following his short stint at Columbia, Greenberg and the Pro Musica moved on to American Decca. Here they spent the remainder of their existence recording a variety of Mediaeval and Renaissance music. Their biggest success was the 12th-century musical “Play of Daniel,” orchestrated by Greenberg himself in a style that crossed the boundaries between genuine Renaissance scoring and 20th-century popular music styles. He added drums to masses, and trumpets where only violas had previously trod, but always with good taste; and his Pro Musica sang with such obvious relish and enthusiasm for their material that, from his day to ours, their recordings stand as timeless classics never to be duplicated and seldom surpassed.



While at Decca, Oberlin finally became a solo star in his own right. He left the group shortly after the run of “Daniel,” became a solo star on Decca, performed in Benjamin Britten’s “Midsummer Night’s Dream” at Covent Garden, then made further recordings as a soloist for both Decca and Columbia until his voice gave out in 1966. Following the usual procedure of the music business, once out of sight he was out of mind. In the ongoing rush of the early music revival of the late 1960s and 1970s, Oberlin’s art was brushed aside and forgotten...at least until his name was brought up in the 1980s by editor James Goodfriend of “High Fidelity” magazine, after which people realized that he was not only one of the great singers but one of the great communicators of his time.

“Barococo”

One of the deleterious effects of the recording and early music booms in the 1950s was the phenomenon known as “Barococo.” Wealthy socialites – and some of the not-so-wealthy ones – held dinner parties at which Baroque and Rococo music was played in the background for ambience. It was the forerunner of today’s “classics for relaxation” fad, which many musicians have decried as a misuse of the music. Though it was true that in the actual Baroque and Rococo eras the music itself was often played as dinner music for royalty and other wealthy patrons, there was the hope that we had moved beyond that point, that we had come to appreciate the music itself for the art form that it is. But such was not the case. As a result, Bach, Scarlatti, Handel, Haydn and Buxtehude were played as accompaniment to hors d’oeuvres and polite chit-chat. And this was a phenomenon not confined to America. In the mid-1960s, composer Benjamin Britten was appalled to discover at a dinner party he was attending that his hosts were playing the Bach “St. Matthew Passion” in the background. He was so offended that he left, and soon afterward wrote an article decrying the deleterious effects of the phonograph on culture. Such were the beginnings of a mass move away from attentive listening and towards a cultural use of good music for atmosphere.

Benjamin Britten: The golden boy of modern music

In 1950, American critic Henry Pleasants wrote “The Agony of Modern Music,” a book complaining about the ugly, arid sounds he took most modern music to be. In a world where Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, Janáček and others were being promoted, he was perfectly in tune with most sensibilities. But there was one composer whose music successfully bridged the gap between the “good” old style and the “bad” modern one, and that was Benjamin Britten.

Britten had studied composition with Frank Bridge, one of the most austere and uncompromising of 20th-century British composers. But one thing Bridge instilled in young Britten was the desire to follow his own muse, wherever it may lead him, and Britten was as keen on the music of Purcell, Schubert, Wolf and Debussy as he was on Bridge and Peter Warlock. In the late 1930s he made a name for himself with some very imaginative and attractive film scores; in the early 1940s, while living in America, he expanded his tonal palette to include some very consonant harmonies and shifting tone-colors that produced such popular works as “Les Illuminations” and the “Seven Sonnets of Michaelangelo.” Upon returning to England in 1942, he immediately established himself at the forefront of popular British composers, and was signed by Walter Legge to make records of his music for the label. Predictably, the “Seven Sonnets” was the first of his projects for the label. This was followed by his arrangements of French folk songs sung by soprano Sophie Wyss (for whom “Les Illuminations” had been written) and arrangements of English folk songs sung by his lover, tenor Peter Pears. But Legge was not altogether thrilled by Britten’s music, and so in 1945 he ventured over to rival Decca to record one of his most popular works, the *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings* as performed by Pears and the excellent hornist Dennis Brain. But that same year, Britten scored a phenomenal national success in England with the Sadlers Wells premiere of his opera, “*Peter Grimes*,” one of a tiny handful of first operas (Beethoven’s “*Fidelio*” and Debussy’s “*Pelléas et Mélisande*” were others) that were deemed masterpieces. (When in America, Britten wrote an operetta based on “*Paul Bunyan*,” but he hated the work and never considered it to be one of his “true” operas.) Again HMV beckoned, and in 1947-48 the label recorded more English folk song arrangements, highlights from “*Grimes*” with original cast members Pears and soprano Joan Cross, and an abridged version of his next op-

era, “The Rape of Lucretia.” Since Legge rather liked its tunefulness, “Lucretia” was issued on 78s, but the “Grimes” highlights sat in the can for thirty years because Legge hated it. Nevertheless, the success of these records for HMV and Decca propelled Britten into the realm of semi-popular success.

In 1954, after several more operatic successes, Britten was beckoned back to Decca-London, where they began building him up into one of the best-selling of all modern composers. Within a decade, he had re-recorded the *Serenade* for Decca as well as making new recordings of “Illuminations” (this time with Pears singing it), the *Nocturne*, “Peter Grimes,” the church parables and *Canticles*. These records not only established Britten as a great composer but also showed the record-buying public that he was one of the finest song accompanists who ever lived and, within his limited range of repertoire, one of the greatest conductors since Toscanini. Indeed, it is possible that, judgments of his complete oeuvre aside, Britten may have been the greatest all-around musical talent the world had seen since Felix Mendelssohn. Unfortunately like Mendelssohn, he had a weak heart and was taken from us far too soon. In his wake he left self-directed performances of all his works except the last ones, which included the opera “*Death in Venice*” and the cantata “*Phaedra*,” as well as what is often cited as the greatest recording of Bach’s *Brandenburg Concertos* and the finest reading of Schubert’s “*Winterreise*” (with Pears) ever committed to disc.

Callas

It is safe to say that no classical artist of the 20th century has aroused such loyalty, bordering on mania or frenzy, than Mary Kalageropoulos, born in Brooklyn in 1923. An unloved child who was considered an “ugly duckling,” she retreated into the world of classical music and particularly opera as a means of losing herself. She had a moderately interesting but quirky voice when young; none who heard her, including Major Bowes of the original *Amateur Hour*, thought she would ever amount to anything. But when her parents divorced in the late 1930s and her mother took her and her sister Jackie to Greece, she threw herself into forging her recalcitrant voice into something both flexible and powerful.

None of her teachers, not even soprano Elvira de Hidalgo who worked with her the longest and hardest, were really sure if Callas (as she shortened her last name) was ever going to make it. In addition to the fact that she was homely, nearsighted and very fat, and could barely clump around the stage when performing, her voice was so phlegmatic that it was touch-and-go as to whether or not it would come out good one day, bad the next. But Callas kept working at it with an almost maniacal intensity, and de Hidalgo noticed that when she was on stage, something magical happened. The ugly duckling became the character she was portraying, so much so that her own personality completely disappeared.

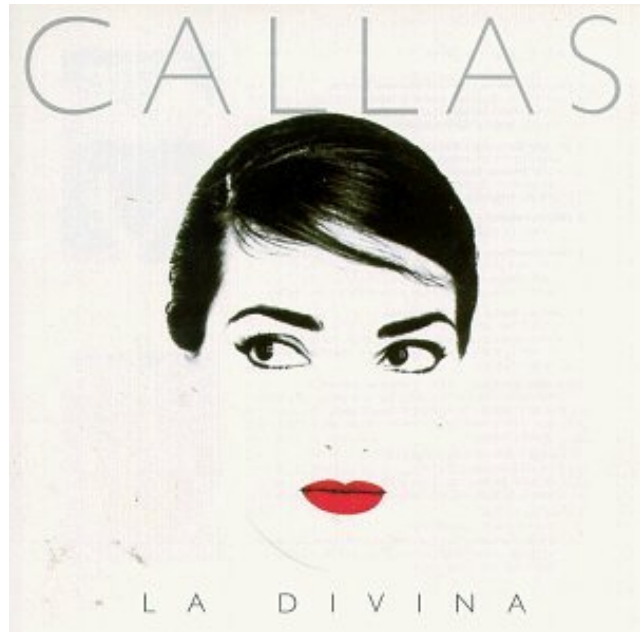
By 1949 Callas was married to the wealthy, older Italian businessman Giovanni Meneghini, who worked overtime to push her career. She was also signed that year to a four-year contract with the Italian Cetra label, who made some 78s with her that year and eventually recorded her in two complete operas, “*La Traviata*” and “*La Gioconda*.” Fortunately for her, however, Meneghini kept pushing her name in the international press, so when her Cetra contract expired, EMI was eagerly waiting to sign her up. The rest, as they say, is history.

Legge was absolutely crazy about Callas, as indeed were many British listeners of the time. He made sure that she was paired with artists of equal merit, among them the mezzo Ebe Stignani, tenors Mario Filippeschi, Giuseppe di Stefano and Nicolai Gedda, baritones Rolando Panerai and Tito Gobbi, basses Nicola Zaccaria and Nicola Rossi-Lemeni, and conductors such as Antonino Votto and the dean of Italian opera after Toscanini, Tullio Serafin.

Serafin had been responsible for molding the somewhat recalcitrant Rosa Ponselle into an artistic marvel in the 1920s. With Callas he had a subject far less difficult to mold as her musical literacy and commitment to excellence were far higher than Ponselle's, though the voice was less beautiful. Yet Serafin, like Nicola Rescigno and Georges Prêtre after him, noticed that this young Greek-American soprano had the unique gift of being able to adapt her voice to the music and role of the moment, so much so that she infused the by-now-ancient "bel canto" scores with dramatic fire and brought a polished technique and phenomenal vocal control to operas that were usually just belted out by others.

Between 1952 and 1961, Callas made an ever-flowing string of complete operas and recital albums for EMI that became instant phonographic classics. Unlike Chaliapin, whose recording career was sporadic and who imposed acting mannerisms on some of the music he sang, Callas recorded consistently – not only in the studio but also in live performance – and imposed musical concepts onto roles normally acted without being sung properly. As in her student days, sometimes the voice was phenomenal, sometimes it wasn't, and even its possessor never knew from day to day how the voice would respond. But when she lost weight in 1954 she metamorphosed from ugly duckling to swan, and her media stock rose astronomically. Callas the fat but exciting diva was a hard sell to audiences who listened with their eyes and not their ears, but Callas the glamorous woman was an icon they could relate to.

Because of her incredibly high standards and fanatical devotion to work, Callas was able to bring the full measure of her art into the recording studio – something Chaliapin was only occasionally able to do. Surprisingly, in an era where television and film was on the rise, there is very little that exists of her in that medium, but when we can see her we realize that she really did surprisingly little on stage. All of her charisma was in her eyes, her hands, the way she moved when she moved. To see and hear her is a cathartic experience, as her face mirrors the emotions of the character being portrayed with uncanny realism; but even on the "dead" medium of records, the character's personality comes alive in a way that others may approximate but never surpass. Callas lost herself in her work so completely that there was no "her" left at all, but only Leonora, Medea, Tosca, Gioconda, Norma. This was done to erase the pain of a mother who rented herself out to soldiers as an afternoon dalliance during the war and cared little for Maria except as a source of income, and who. Her mother's behavior disgusted Callas, her treatment of her hurt her deeply. Work was the one way she could forget all that and concentrate on being someone else; and she did this so successfully that, to this day, her records outsell that of any opera singer who ever lived.



Yet this kind of "record success" is particularly odd when one considers the almost manic pace at which these discs were made. What would later be considered normal preparations for the recording of a complete opera – two weeks' rehearsal time, setting proper recording levels and balances – were virtually thrown out the window in EMI's feverish attempt to capture every role Callas wanted to record (some of which she never sang on stage or only

sang once) on discs. Often, one complete opera set would be recorded on the heels of another. The only thing that saved these projects from ruin was the complete professionalism of Callas, her conductors and her colleagues, but even then the recorded balances between the singers, or singers and orchestra, were often skewed. In the Karajan-led “Trovatore,” for instance, the final trio of Act 1 has all three singers more or less screaming into the same single pickup microphone, with poor balance results; and on the 1957 Votto-conducted “Ballo in Maschera,” not one of the many ensembles – which happen to be the heart and soul of this finely-balanced opera – are equalized properly. The shrill soprano of the Oscar often predominates when it shouldn’t, Callas and her tenor (di Stefano) are occasionally out of synch, and in both this recording and the “Turandot” (a role she never sang on stage) the overall effect is one of a thin orchestra, treble-heavy chorus and individual singers all trying to “give a performance” when in fact all you really hear are isolated scenes, recorded separately, spliced together. Fortunately Callas’ complete, Zen-like focus on her roles helped make her contributions, at least, sound complete and completely realized, even in the midst of chaos. In this respect, her recorded legacy is perhaps the most complex and interesting relationship of artist to medium ever attempted or accomplished.

The Beat Generation: jazz and poetry

During this period of economic growth for various facets of the music industry, there remained a small but hard-core group of outsiders who rejected not only society’s mores but also the popular culture surrounding them. These were the Beats, a group of predominantly Columbia University-trained writers and poets who saw their world in a pure, Zen-like state and reveled in the act of being. Their exponents were Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Diane Di Prima and William S. Burroughs; their music was the music of the streets, the rhythm of poetry, the off-center rhythmic excursions of Moondog and the pulse-throbbing rhythms of jazz. They, like other jazzers, loved the music of Brubeck, George Shearing, Shorty Rogers and Charles Mingus, but they loved it in a way that went much deeper than that of the casual listener. They also met and discussed such issues as the quality of life and where it was all going to lead them.

Very little of their ideas and philosophies made it into the cultural mainstream, at least not until the early 1960s by which time they themselves had become an institution of sorts. But their iconoclastic viewpoint colored and influenced culture in a way that was outside the mainstream. It was a world of ideas that no longer exists because our populace, like that of Ray Bradbury’s “Fahrenheit 451,” is too much in love with the sound of their own voices as well as the voices and images that flow from the dominant media culture. Ironically, the Beats were major consumers not only of blues and jazz records but also of classical media, which they took to heart and understood for the message of man’s struggle against an intolerant, dominant overclass that refused to acknowledge the intelligence and sensibilities of those many who lacked their formal education.

This was to become a recurrent theme, not only in America but also in those Eastern European countries where bright, sensitive working class people did not have the same access to art music as they had to visual art. Going to an art gallery was usually inexpensive or free; but attending an arts music program usually cost money, as did the acquisition of recordings that were often target-marketed for a different societal class.

But things were about to change, at first for the better, then for the worse. And it was all part of the same commercial structure.